

have a fight. That is what democracy is about—debate. We will have a debate about the future of these programs, including Medicare. It is a debate I look forward to.

We must fix Medicare with respect to its financial solvency for the long term. That is not a fence that you cannot get over. It is, in my judgment, not a difficult thing to do. But we should not, in ways that some suggest, continually try to weaken a program that works so well.

No one, in my judgment, should lament the fact we are having this kind of debate about whether we spend money on the Medicare Program, whether we give a tax cut to Donald Trump, whether we build star wars—all of which are proposed. No one should lament that. The political system is constructed to have that kind of a debate in our country.

President Kennedy used to say, "Every mother kind of hopes that her child might grow up to be President, as long as they don't have to get involved in politics." The irony is that the political system is a system in which we debate these issues of the day for our country and its future.

I look forward to the coming weeks as we debate the future of Medicare. I hope that this full-page ad in *USA Today*, with a tombstone for Medicare, in which the Republicans pledge to save Medicare—a political party that opposed it with every bit of their breath and energy 30 years ago—I hope this represents a determination by the Republicans to join us and say Medicare should be available for the long term for America's elderly who need it, not with less coverage and higher costs, but instead with good coverage at modest cost, with a program that celebrates America's success.

I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### ON THE RETIREMENT OF MARIAM BECHTEL

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, I rise today to extend my heartfelt thank you to Mariam Bechtel who is retiring after 17 years of loyal service to the Congress.

Mariam has served my Senate office since February 1984. Additionally, she served in the office of Congressman Page Belcher from Oklahoma for 6 years before joining my staff.

Everyone who has come in contact with Mariam Bechtel, and I know that she has many friends throughout the Congress, knows of her warm and cheerful manner. When Members needed a room to host a reception or meet-

ing, they knew that Mariam was the one to call. When Kansans needed to touch base in Washington, they knew to call Mariam.

Mariam has always gone that extra mile—to help a fellow Senator, their constituents, and of course, Kansans.

I ask my colleagues to join me in wishing Mariam and her husband Charlie all the best in their retirement. And thank you Mariam for your dedicated service to me and to the Senate.

#### PRASAD SHARMA

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, I rise today to say farewell and thank you to Prasad Sharma who has served my office as a legislative correspondent and staff assistant for the past year. Prasad was recently accepted by the Emory University School of Law, a high honor which he richly deserves.

A Kansan himself, Prasad has been a real asset. He has kept the people of Kansas informed about important events in Washington, served a vital role on my defense and national security team, and Prasad has always been someone to rely on when things needed to get done.

I ask my colleagues to join me in wishing Prasad Sharma all the best at Emory and in his future endeavors. He is someone I know we will hear a lot more from in the years to come, because he is an outstanding young man.

#### ELDERCARE

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, this week marks the 30th anniversary of Medicare—the Health Care Program that currently serves 4 million disabled Americans and about 33 million elderly Americans.

Anniversaries are normally a time for celebration. But, this 30th anniversary is a time of great concern.

As we all know, the Medicare trustees, three of whom are members of the President's Cabinet, have warned us that, at best, Medicare has only seven more anniversaries left before going bankrupt.

Mr. President, I believe one of the most important responsibilities of this Congress is to preserve, improve, and protect Medicare so that it does not go bankrupt and will continue to be there for Americans for the next 30 years, and the 30 years beyond that.

Before I look to the future, however, I want to take just a minute to look to the past.

When Medicare was debated in Congress in 1965, I voted against it.

And there are those at the Democrat National Committee who seem to believe that vote is either proof that I am out to gut Medicare, or that it disqualifies me from participating in this debate.

I only wish they would devote as much energy to the search for solutions to Medicare's current fiscal crisis, as they do to questioning the motives of others.

My vote against Medicare was not a decision I made lightly. I knew my vote would lead to a round of criticism. But in the end, I voted against the legislation for several reasons.

The first reason was because I had concerns that we would be establishing an entitlement for many Americans who truly were not in need of Government assistance. We all know that by their very nature, entitlements are designed to grow. And, as we have seen over the past 30 years, the Medicare entitlement has done precisely that.

In 1965, when Medicare was enacted, the House Ways and Means Committee predicted that the part A portion would cost \$9 billion in 1990. Needless to say, they were wrong. By 1974, we were spending \$9 billion—just 8 years after Medicare's passage. This year, Medicare part A will cost \$158 billion—58 times the amount it cost in its first year.

Second, I was concerned that this growing entitlement would be financed either through higher taxes or deficit spending, and that both of these options would compromise the futures of generations to come. Again, by 1974, the tax rate to finance the program was already twice the initial projection.

And the third factor behind my vote was that I shared many of the concerns articulated by the then President of the American Medical Association, Dr. Leonard Larson, who said:

The administration's medical care proposal, if enacted, would certainly represent the first major, irreversible step toward the complete socialization of medical care. The bill does not provide insurance or prepayment of any type, but compels one segment of our population to underwrite a socialized program of health care for another, regardless of need.

Mr. President, the AMA at that time put forward an alternative proposal, called Eldercare, which I supported.

I must say as I look back on that day in 1965 and on the weeks before the debate, and I have gone back to check the *CONGRESSIONAL RECORD* and some of the statements made by my colleagues, Elder Care had many more benefits than Medicare. We covered prescription drugs in Elder Care, which are still not covered today under Medicare. In addition, that plan would have cost less because it took into account the beneficiaries' ability to pay.

Would Medicare be in better shape today had my concerns been addressed at its creation? I believe it would. And I also believe that if nothing is done and Medicare goes bankrupt, the American public will not look back at 1965 to decide where to fix blame—they will look back to 1995.

So, where do we go from here?

Mr. President, we cannot turn back the clock. But, we can learn from the past. And, that means doing what is necessary to improve Medicare so that it can move successfully into the 21st century.

Despite the rhetoric coming out of the White House and the Democratic